DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 027 345 TE 500 551

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Pub Date Mar 69

Note-9p.; Paper presented at Southwest Regional Conference on English in the Junior College, Fort Worth, Texas, March 13-14, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55

Descriptors-Articulation (Program), College Teachers, *English Curriculum, *English Instruction, *Higher Education, *Instructional Improvement, Program Planning, *Teacher Attitudes, Teaching Techniques

An imaginative characterization portrays English teachers as one of four types: "Mighty Stonehenges," "Mad Mods," "Limpid Gazelles," and "Neo-realists." Of these types, the first three represent respectively the "ivory tower traditionalists," "latter day saints in the spell of experimental programs," and obsequious followers who jot verbatim quotations from a Mighty Stonehenge. The "Neo-realist" serves as a model for what can be done to change the isolationist image of the English teacher and put him in effective contact with his class. Ways to stimulate a more "realistic" approach to English teaching at all levels are briefly discussed. (CW)

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THERE'S A REAL WORLD OUT THERE, AND THAT'S WHERE IT'S HAPPENING, BABY

William C. Doster

This is a true story. Not even the names of the participants have been changed to protect the innocent -- or the guilty!

Last April, on my way home from the CCCC bash in Minneapolis, I made a kind of sentimental side trip to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to see some friends from World War II, people I had not seen in twenty-five years. On Sunday afternoon, I boarded the plane to Kansas City, and the only vacant seat was next to an very attractive, young, blonde girl; I noted a couple of textbooks in her lap and concluded, quite logically, that she was a student somewhere. Where? I asked. Springfield Bible College in Missouri, she answered, and did she have problems! She had no continuing reservation beyond Kansas City, and if she missed the plane on which she was listed as stand by, she would be late getting to the campus, and her housemother would lock her out for missing the 10:30 curfew. She was disturbed, and assuming my most soothing counseling voice, I tried to assure her that she just could not be campused, that surely her housemother would understand about the difficulties of air travel on a week-end. No, she said, the old battleaxe didn't understand anything except the rules in the student handbook. The stewardess served us a coke (among the books on her lap was a Bible, so I decided to be on my purest behavior), and finally the young lady got around to asking me what I did for a living -- couched in those terms, I might add. I'm a teacher, I told her. Of what? she asked. English, I replied. She threw up both hands and said, "I'm not going to say another word on this whole flight!" AND she didn't!

Now, each of you can probably duplicate that experience from your own lives as English teachers, and I have a couple of questions: Where did we go wrong? What has happened to the public image of the English teacher in this country? Have we made people so fearful and self conscious about their language

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usage or whatever that they are literally afraid to open their mouths in our presence? Do most people wonder if we have so little tact that we might correct some slip ~~in usage~~ or that we might laugh? For the past day and a half, we have been discussing the training of junior college English teachers, and I just wonder if we can't include some where in the curriculum a course that could only be called the Humanization of English Teachers. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that we -- all of us -- have lived among books and papers for so long that we have lost touch with what's going on out there. Maybe we should take a hard look -- that's a choice phrase -- at ourselves to see if, perhaps, we might not be able to remedy a bad situation.

For a few minutes, I'd like to discuss with you four types of English teachers that I have met within the past twenty-five years of teaching -- Gad, has it been <u>that</u> long? -- and maybe from some of the characteristics of these groups we might come up with just where we <u>did</u> go wrong back there somewhere. It is a speaker's prerogative to ask nasty questions, and he has no real obligation to answer them, but I want to be different -- I want to propose <u>an</u> answer anyhow.

The first group, at the very top of the academic ladder, consists of the Mighty Stonehenges. Let's single out just one of this type for some analysis. You've seen him at MLA, NCTE, and maybe even once in a while at the CCCC conventions -- tweedy, bepiped, serious, and nowadays, to show that he is not too conservative, bearded. Holt, Brown, and Universe has just published the fifteenth edition of his handbook-rhetoric -- which still defines a noun as a word which names a person, place or thing, and he can anticipate sales of at least 30,000 copies a year, with the attendant royalty checks forthcoming regularly. He pontificates at the drop of an ice cube, and his constant pontification is that traditional grammar is still the answer to all of our problems. He has the MLA syndrome -- that's the only name for the disease I can think of -- he is concerned with professorial rank (he has been a full professor since 1938), the academic pecking order, and is still enraptured with the notion that somebody's rhetoric (never mind whose so long as it's his) is

the best book since the Bible or at least Bishop Lowth's grammar. You can see him at publisher parties, the ornament of the gathering, sitting in a quiet corner in the most comfortable chair in the room, holding a drink (sherry if he feels sober, bourbon and branch water if he feels daring), maintaining court, nodding wisely at times when he agrees with the courtier, frowning when he disagrees -- all from the ivory tower of his eminence as department chairman at a prestigious university. Always, though, you will find him declaiming about the decline in quality of the few graduate students he is called upon to teach once a year in his Chaucer seminar. Yes, he has published articles in PMLA and other esoteric quarterlies; his latest is <u>the</u> definitive study of the color of the Wife of Bath's shoe -- he has concluded on the basis of all of the internal evidence that it was a rich maroon with perhaps a green trim. Now, no one else need ever concern himself with that noble lady's footwear; the Mighty Stonehenge has written; and all questions about such a matter in the future have been resolved. This man is literally out of this world and enjoys his reign on Cloud 158, and fortunately his breed is getting rarer. BUT how many graduate students has he infected with the MLA syndrome, and where are we to find the serum to cure the disease before others are similarly infected?

The second group, I would call the Mad Mods, the latter day saints and prophets, caught up in the spell of McLuhanism and experimental programs of all kinds, willing to try anything once, and convinced this year (again!) that this year's word -- <u>relevance</u>, I believe it is -- has all the answers to all of our problems on every level of English teaching. Last year's word has been forgotten as passé, and next year's word is still lumbering toward Champaign to be born. Their emphasis is always on the off-beat, the imaginative, the trial-and-error, the no-regrets-if-the-whole-thing-fails approach to the teaching of everything, and if a gem sometimes emerges from the winnowing process, fine and dandy, jolly, peachy keen. Some of the Mad Mods are in their sixties -- age is <u>not</u> a criterion for lumping someone into this group, and they are still searching for the magic that will reveal <u>all</u> to themselves and their students. Once in a while, there comes a Dan Fader or a Benjamin DeMott or a Ken Macrorie from this group, but most of

these people are so busy experimenting that they don't have time to experiment. At least, unlike the Mighty Stonehenges, they are aware that not all the answers have been found to any of our questions, and they are seeking. From their experiments, there may emerge a Maharishi who will pronounce "OM" upon us in benediction, and we will sweep away the years of misunderstanding and failures and regain from the mountain top experience a new awareness of what we can do with students in an English class. Alas, that time is not yet, but in the future ----- ?

The third group I call the Limpid Gazelles. You've seen them at conferences -- often their very first; they are quiet, silent, introspective, uncertain, confused, worried, listening, indecisive, waiting for Lightning and THE WORD they can take back with them to their classrooms somewhere. In sessions, you can see them with their tape recorders or steno notebooks, jotting down the verbatim quotations, ~~the rubies of wisdom,~~ from the Mighty Stonehenges and the Mad Mods; they seem afraid that they might miss a ruby of wisdom from a Mighty Stonehenge, especially; if he said it (never mind what he said!), then that must be the way it is. At least this group, many among them overworked junior college teachers, are seeking and they are in a classroom somewhere working their ways on freshman composition students -- they may not be doing the best job that could be done, but at least they have contact with that real world through their students. Every once in a while a spark ignites, and the ideas flow.

The last group I call the Neo-realists, and it is this group I want to concentrate on for a few minutes. They know, as the other three groups often don't really understand, that there is a real world out there beyond the walls of the classroom, and in this real world there are things happening that many other teachers have no small notion of. There IS dope, there IS sex, there IS life, there IS the ghetto, and the Neo-realists understand that the experiences their students bring with them to the classsoom are often more significant sources of written and oral composition than the embalmed contents of any anthology of essays or short stories or poems or dramas ever published anywhere by

anybody. AND they are NOT unwilling to make use of their students' experiences within the classroom -- I guess this is the dividing line that sets this group from the other three -- they are not afraid to let students talk and write about whatever, and I mean the word literally, they feel strongly about, and some of the people in our classrooms DO feel strongly about many subjects: the war in Viet Nam, LAUGH-IN, conformity, love, sex, many things. The Neo-realists are not afraid to use a commercial film (not the educational garbage that some companies sterilize before releasing) to turn a student on. THE HUSTLER GRADUATE has more to say to Joe College, 1969, than Clifton Fadiman talking in tranquillizing tones about HUCKLEBERRY FINN. Ghetto language HAS a power that antiseptic, handbook approved English lacks -- in spades. There IS such a thing as a dialectical difference, and this difference should be cherished as a sign of a student's ego, his life, his aspirations, the lack of "correctness"of it be damned.

How do these Neo-realists operate at the junior college level? Let me call your attention to what I hope will be a forthcoming NCTE publication by Elisabeth McPherson and Gregory Cowan, both of Forest Park Community College, St. Louis. Just last week, I had a sneak preview of the document (about sixty pages long) which summarizes their efforts to draw up a viable curriculum for their own school. It sounds like a great course to me, the philosophic under structure is sound, and it will please many of the exponents of "behavioral objectives" that seem to be proliferating about the land these days. I hope the National Junior College Committee, when it meets in Miami Beach in April, will authorize its publication in some way, even if it has to underwrite the expense itself. There have been a few seminal documents on the teaching of English at the junior college level within the past ten years (for one, the Weingarten-Kroeger report; for another, the papers presented at the 1965 Tempe conference), and I think that the McPherson-Cowan statement will join these other two. Be on the watch for it, and if you have to, sit over your academic dean and/or president with a gun to make him read every word -- three times if necessary.

Besides this document, which I have deliberately not told you much about, what else can we find in that real world outside to help us with our students? I have long believed that we can't really do anything on our own. I know it's fashionable for every higher level of education to blame the next lower level for not doing its job -- students can't read in junior high because the grammar school teachers didn't teach them, students can't write in high school because they weren't given compositions to write in junior high, and so on, ad nauseum. At the junior college, we may be in a unique position to get some cooperation and articulation going throughout the school system in which each of us serves. We are close enough to the high schools, and heaven knows our students have just come to us from that system in most cases, so that we may be able to influence what goes on there. In turn, we might even stimulate some activity further down the road to get some things done in junior high and grammar school and maybe even in kindergarten. The Mighty Stonehenges have given up; they say, flatly, that the open door is nonsense, that students should be flunked if they can't write or read at the college level, and that the junior college ~~may be~~ is nothing more than a baby sitting operation. Pish, and likewise tush! I would bet my next contribution to the departmental coffee fund that we are closer to the real world than a Mighty Stonehenge has been in thirty years -- even if that person is only twenty-nine years old.

What do we do, then? Do we, like the Stonehenges, just throw up our hands, retreat into the most convenient LSD parlor (this decade's substitute for the ivory tower), turn our eyes piously toward heaven, and sulk that no one is teaching, learning, speaking, or reading English as WE once did? Obviously impossible, or there would be a slew of English teachers out of work and eligible for economic opportunity programs. No one in his right mind destroys his own job, though we might be more honest if we did. Let me suggest a sequential -- that's another this year's word -- GOOD English course -- notice, please, I did not say a course in GOOD English. At lower levels (nursery school

probably through the fifth or sixth grade) heavy doses of speech. Maybe, at this level, a teacher could place a child alone in a room with a tape recorder or other programed machine which could be set to play back some examples of clear, concise English, recorded by an excellent speaker -- would you believe Sir Laurence Olivier or Sidney Poitier? The child could record his own speech patterns and improve them through a great deal of practice. At the same time, the child could be reading, reading, reading, reading, and watching many good films, either in the classroom or on television to provide himself with certain experiences which his life in the real world might not have provided. Parsing and sentence diagraming and working in work books are excellent means of teaching parsing and sentence diagraming and working in work books, but what has one really accomplished in teaching a child about his own language in doing these time wasters? After all, a child has been speaking his language for several years before he enters school, and once the pattern has been set into the language-making machinery in his brain, substantial alteration is probably not possible, Henry Higgins to the contrary notwithstanding. In another classroom, if the teacher feels that correctness is a vade mecum, he might have the parents and all of the associates of the child so that the environment of the home and community won't destroy the perfection which the school has so carefully established.

By junior high, a student might start trying to put his speech and hearing patterns on paper and reading more advanced materials to add additional experiences. Grabbing the student's interest is the main thing here, though.

By high school, if the student has not absorbed what he needs to speak and write a socially and professionally acceptable (white, middle class acceptable, please note) English, then the teachers might as well give up. If they think they can do much to change a student's language habits at this age, they are operating under a greater illusion than Lady Godiva who thought her long hair covered the subject. Repair, remedial, basic English courses -- call them whatever you will -- probably cost more money and expend more time than the rest of the curriculum put together, and it's nonsense to expect miracles in either speech or writing from a

young person who shows little or no interest in self-improvement. Let's admit that we keep a child in an English class for four years during his high school years because everyone else is doing it and not kid ourselves that we are actually helping him in any significant way. Four years of high school English probably won't hurt the better students, for they have a way of surviving almost anything. For the poor student, these four years simply add to his frustration and loss of his self-esteem. Perhaps here, right here, we have developing that image of the English teacher as a hopeless drudge who is anxious for everyone to slip so that he (or she) may pounce and suck blood. In high school, if the foundation has been prepared satisfactorily through the lower grades, there is no need to teach "rules" of grammar (What two grammarians agree on the "rules" anyhow or the best way in which they can be taught?), and an English teacher can provide a student of literature -- hopefully no SILAS MARNER or GREAT EXPECTATIONS or JULIUS CAESAR -- and mass media presentations. It might be possible to help a student develop some reading speed through specialized courses and machines -- ϕf the student wants to speed along.

In junior college, an English course, ideally, might consist of some study of the history of language and English, more attention to semantics, and more complex written and oral responses to sight, sound, or film stimulii. Since we now live primarily in a visual rather than a print world -- McLuhan -- English teachers are foolish to try to sweep television and the movies and the musical recording onto academe's front porch where, maybe, the winds of mischance will blow them all away. Rod McKuen, the Beatles, and others have more to say in poetry to our students than Shelley or Shakespeare or Wordsworth or Milton -- heresy, heresy, heresy!

As a college junior, if a student indicates that he might consider majoring in English, we might pour on the genre courses, the one-man courses to allow the Mighty Stonehenges to get some good from their usually unpublishable dissertations. Heavily thrown in here, though, should be some unsnobbish training in the use of the mass media, especially if the student expresses a mad desire to teach English as some level. A pinch of learning theory and a dash of pedagogy wouldn't hurt, either, for a teacher should

know HOW to teach almost as well as he knows WHAT to teach. (again, heresy, heresy, hersy!) He or she can always go to the library and get a book if a student asks a trohblesome question about Ben Jonson's quatrains; he doesn't need to take a graduate course in just that.

What about the ill-prepared, the basic, the remedial student at the junior college ;evel? Aye, there's the rub. Pressure on him to added's to verb forms won't work; haraunging him about subject-verb agreement won't help; plopping him in front of an auto-tutor won't do the job of handbookifying his language. What will -- if that's really necessary, and I'm not convinced that it is? Let me refer you again to the McPherson-Cowan document or to the long article BY ROBERT Louis in the ~~most recent~~ January COLLEGE ENGLISH. These are the best sources of help for these students that I know anything about.

I would propose, quite seriously, that we abandon the teaching of ENGLISH and try teaching the language of the real world for a change. This is NOT to say that one should join 'em if he can't lick 'em. It IS to say that we should face the facts about ~~out~~ English instruction and quit trying to fool ourselves and our students and the tax payers (or tuition payers in private schools) that we are doing what we say we are doing or that it is even possible to do what we say we are doing. Maybe we can save the language of the real world as a vehicle for meaningful communication. Most people have forsaken English, so what have we got to lose?

After all, there is that REAL world out there, and THAT'S where everything's happening, baby. That's where the people, yes, the people, are, and that's where we should be -- happening right along with them.